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MINOR CONTRIBUTIONS.

OBSERVATIONS ON COLLEGE SENIORS AND ELECTIVES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SUBJECTS.

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A few years ago Dr. G. Stanley Hall, then professor of psychology in the Johns Hopkins University, asked eleven professors of philosophical subjects in all the larger eastern and two western colleges or universities, to request their senior students near the close of their last year to answer carefully and in writing the few simple questions below. From these answers about two hundred and twenty were selected for this report. Nearly all received were deliberate and serious and not a few were elaborated to considerable length. They do not admit of statistical presentation, but, collated as below (chiefly in the *words of the student, each clause representing a person*), form a composite portrait of the positions held, and the educational value of these studies from the student standpoint, of significance for teachers of these subjects. They have not only educational but anthropological significance, and reflect many sides and phases of mental evolution or psychogenesis which an ordinary examination paper does not touch.

I. The first question was *why these studies were chosen*. Here only answers where these studies are elective or optional are considered (178). Excluding nearly a score of cases where the determining factor was the advice of parents, a friend, or personal liking for the professor, or respect for his reputation, or a choice between two or more evils to avoid a still more hated study, the motives fall readily into the two classes of utilitarian and more purely educational. Five chose psychology as a study useful for medicine, three chose philosophical subjects as helpful for law, twenty as a preparation for theological study, four each for history and literature, others as a help to know character, to know motives and how to deal with men, to know self and others. The less practical objects sought by thirty-nine were mental discipline or culture; thirty-six sought further light in problems in the field of natural history including evolution, seven sought a better grasp of problems in physical sciences, about three-score sought light on religious and ethical questions, or it was a chance discussion of free will that had turned the scale.

Some wanted help to judge of doubtful acts, many had theological doubts they hoped to have cleared up, or wanted to find a few certain beliefs, or to obviate trouble that had arisen about materialism, agnosticism, evolution, or necessity and freedom, in this order of frequency. Other reasons were specified as follows: to avoid the fatal narrowness of the specialist, to learn to detect and avoid fallacies, to get insight into mind, and rational processes and laws as a necessary part of a liberal education, because it was as broadening as classics, to learn of the great teachers of the world, from interest in phrenology, had heard of Berkeley and idealism and would know what it was all about, from interest awakened by a phrenological examination, to counteract the effects of Kant, as an harmless and elevating amusement, to increase general intelligence and to know that Kant did not serve under Cæsar and that Plato was not a Dutchman, to get poise between the extremes of empiricism and rationalism. Several hoped to gain a birds-eye view of the whole field of knowledge, or to see the background of the sciences, to be able to understand and talk intelligently upon the important questions of the day, to see how philosophy dealt with the questions of science, to learn what the great minds of the world had thought upon its greatest questions, or to find the last and best words of the greatest thinkers of every age upon subjects of greatest interest to man in his highest capacity. One could not tell why it was chosen, but took to it as a duck to water, one believed himself best fitted for and most likely to excel in it. One had before found it a part of his life. One expected to find it the basis of all other studies and had heard of it as the science of sciences. Another thought it the résumé of all other studies. Another reasoned, that as science dealt with matter, and philosophy with mind, it would teach him how to deal with men. One thought that as it was abstract it would require and develop more keenness of insight and power of application. One had wondered what thought was, anyway, and how great minds worked. One would learn to direct his life by it, to influence others more, it would help and insure progress, or to get settled in belief, strengthen conviction, to learn to tell false from true, to get a foundation, to clear up the question of immortality, to settle the question of inspiration of the Bible and miracles, to know God and duty, to understand the relations of mind and matter, to know the great problems of the world and of individual thinkers, to get rid of dogmatism, to gain independence of thought, power of generalization, ability to make comprehensive judgments, to arrange very unassimilated facts, to concentrate and direct my efforts, to know general principles, to get the

habit of accurate thinking, to develop my mental powers as far as possible.

Among the more elaborated and detailed answers to the first question are two which give great prominence to a love of discussion and debate, and the strange magical attraction of all questions which had two even sides or even those in their nature insoluble; several whose philosophical interest began at some particular moment, perhaps in early boyhood, when the question occurred suddenly, perhaps before a mirror, ‘Who or what am I, what is I, or how did I come to be I and not some one else in part or in whole?’ and speaking one’s own name or gazing at it written, as in a spell, increased the self-estrangement and wonder. Several describe a great growing sense of the strangeness and unreality of all things, and even persons about them. What are things; are they real; what do I and they mean? One was possessed for years with the haunting suspicion that probably only things at the moment attended to were really real, and all others, perhaps, passed out of existence. Several had spun crude theories of their own they wished to test. Two describe an attack of theological skepticism with detail, which, especially in one case, is pathetic and almost magnificent; and one had had a prolonged and hardly less serious experience with the problem of free will, which these studies were to clear up.

II. The second question was, “*what have you already gained of value from these studies?*” Only six profess to have gained nothing. Of these, one hated it, another had forever lost his peace of mind and wished he had never heard of philosophy, two had had their curiosity deepened (one would study it forty years like Kant before he could answer this question), two still had little, but expected much. Another small group of students had been made more discriminative but less confident, if anything, or had concluded that common-sense, or in one case, unreflecting conscience was not a safe guide, one that all off-hand judgments were worthless, one that to actually prove anything was impossible, one that the contradictions of experience could not be reconciled, one that things were not as they seemed, or not so real after all. One had come to so hate introspection and analogies that he would escape their paralyzing effects by becoming as much of an animal as possible. One had gained so many more doubts than he ever heard of before that he was miserable and had even meditated suicide at two different times. Two had learned that their mission was to combat or expose agnosticism, skepticism, materialism or determinism.

The chief advantage gained and most often specified was

religious. The most common or typical phrases are as follows:—Clearer apprehension of God and duty; satisfied all my formerly grave intellectual difficulties about religion; shown me the ground for my religious belief; made me able to comprehend the divine government; removed the sense of conflict between science and theism; shown me the authority of the bible, God, immortality; convinced me of free will; revealed the truths at the basis of religion; has brought me by considering non-christian truths to understand and see the superiority of christianity; my ideas of God and nature are changed, enlarged, established; has revealed solid foundations by clearing away much rubbish in religion; has taught me to respect sincere doubts and to relieve them; has given me a few positive convictions to live and work by; has settled the mind and given faith better foundations.

Nearly all specified one or more of the following motives or notes:—*Growth*, e. g., gained mental development; made a man of the boy; matured me more than any other study; more than all the previous three years; the evolution of the highest truths from many systems has aroused me, compelled reflection, generated in me a new life, etc. *Discipline*:—e. g., increased my power of application; quickened perception and apprehension; made me able to deal with abstract ideas and questions; to choose premises and reason logically; to analyze all things and see the relations between parts and the whole; to see fallacies and direct the parts in a discussion; to concentrate and direct all my efforts; given the habit of accurate thinking; to exercise the mind rather than cram it with facts, etc. *Unity and relation*:—e. g., it has given unity to my mind and to all my life; shown me my relations to others and to universal truths; has shown me one basis for all future study; that the relation of things is the form of reason; that all knowing is relating; taught the organic unity of the world. *Breadth and depth*:—It goes to the bottom and gets absolute proof of things; gives the habit of looking at the nature of things and shows reasons and causes, principles vs. facts, meat vs. shell, makes candid and fair-minded; shows subjects in all their bearings; goes to the heart of things and teaches the folly of superficiality; have been greatly broadened and deepened, etc. *Miscellaneous matters cleared up*:—Evolution, relation of mind and matter, and of brain and thought; has shown the great problems of the world one by one; gives insight into the turning points of great questions; the keys to the treasure house of knowledge; kills all prejudices against men and views; shows me my mistakes in thought and action; makes me tolerant of even unpopular things, and to make allowance for even

children and the ignorant ; feel the necessity of testing all theories ; gives an idea of human progress and the unity of history ; turns the mind in on itself ; gives new and stronger interest in all other branches of knowledge ; freedom from conventionalism and dogmatism.

To illustrate the form of these very interesting returns I quote from a few.

1. I have at last won a few convictions I can live by and preach. They have brought me much peace. I have been at sea a long time ; I have now landed and got a little patch of ground to cultivate ; I begin to feel the blessedness of a purely individualistic mental attitude, and this is the label of my creed.

2. I have been deeply interested in philosophy and philosophers, but have adopted no particular opinion and cast no anchor. I have been working by myself on criteria of truth and grounds of belief. I feel and believe we know some absolute truth, but I am at a loss to know from either books, professors, or my own thinking, how I shall be certain as to what is absolute truth. I expect to outgrow this state and so keep right on studying. I am looking for a modest postulate to start with. Reaction from Prof.——'s dogmatic theology first caused me to study philosophy.

3. The desire for a unitary and harmonious mental universe has been the most conscious if not deepest motive in all my philosophical study and reading. My second great interest is in history as a development of thought. The results of philosophic study for me have been largely negative,—an emancipation of the mind. I am less imposed on by theories and terms. Even ideas like substance, cause, necessity, render up their absoluteness. As a cathartic for purifying and purging the mind nothing equals philosophy. I have gained also a few fixed points or fundamental ways of looking at things, e. g., the absolute oneness of the universe and the general truth of idealism, the laws of intelligence or insight into the structure of the universe.

4. I have determined to devote myself to philosophy from love of unravelling, tucking in ragged edges, and generally transposing my ideas from a more chaotic to a more systematic and concentrated shape,—a formal interest therefore. At the outset, the *material* mystery of what the nature of the world is, whether rational or otherwise, goaded me a good deal and I hoped for a solution. At present, I do not hope for it in the way I did then, as a decision *positive*. I believe philosophy shows us that we are entitled to make practical assumptions in the matter, skepticism itself being the assumption of a definite practical attitude. This *permission* on the part of philosophy I reckon a great material gain.

III. *Whose writings in these fields have impressed you most?* The answers are in order of frequency beginning with the authors most numerous preferred :—Herbert Spencer, Kant, Emerson, George Eliot, Plato, Carlyle, Hume, Hegel, Descartes, Darwin, Huxley, Kingsley, Cicero, Wordsworth, Keats, J. S. Mill, Locke, Pope, Jevons, Schwegler, Coleridge, Paley, Max Müller, Joseph Cook, Flint, G. H. Lewes, Hawthorne, Browning, John Fiske, Hickok, Bushnel, Edwards. Many others received individual mention.

IV. *What subjects covered by the courses in this department have interested you most?* The answers, again in order of frequency, were as follows :—Evolution, deity, theological questions, free will, psychological marvels, idealism, agnosticism, animal intelligence, origin and validity of knowledge, heredity, pessimism, pantheism, immortality, brain-centres, hypnotism, education, space and time, progressive orthodoxy, transcendentalism, nebular hypothesis.

Material so diversified can be presented statistically only with some arbitrariness, but if it is hard to count, it is still harder to weigh. It is surprising that the respects in which the standpoint, opinion or method of the different professors, institutions or even the different philosophical disciplines differ are almost never apparent in these returns. On the other hand the most diverse degrees of both maturity and proficiency are strikingly manifest. Most became deeply interested and thought they found great good and enlargement which was very rarely measured by utilitarian ends. There is also a genuineness, sincerity and great earnestness about these unformed first boy-manish impressions of the great problems of the world and man, and hardly a trace of affectation. These matters are real, the interests are living, and a few papers could be selected as constituting an ideal examination far deeper than any professor's questions go. If all instructors would habitually append question II to every examination paper they would, we think, learn very much of value to them as teachers concerning the forms of youthful interest that are strongest, and the bottom quintessential wisdom that abides, and would thus be able to greatly, if slowly, increase their pedagogic powers of adaptation. If this kind of investigation were followed out in more detail much further light would be shed, we are convinced, upon the practical question of electives, and upon the psychological anthropology of the later stages of adolescent maturity.

A more comprehensive collection and a more detailed study of such returns in the light of this general and preliminary survey would, without a doubt, yield results of great scientific and practical value.